

Testimony of

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*Regarding the Human Services Provisions  
of Governor Malloy's Budget Proposal*  
Appropriations Committee

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Good evening, my name is Normarie Martinez. Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony and the information I have to share about my work as a Healthy Start care coordinator at StayWell Health Center in Waterbury. I hope this information is valuable as you make the difficult decisions about the Governor's budget and understand why eliminating the Healthy Start program and reducing the income limits for HUSKY A Parents and Pregnant Women will be a disaster in our community.

The Healthy Start program provides case management and health education on high-priority public health issues such as healthcare coverage, prenatal care, pediatric care, perinatal depression, smoking cessation, oral health care and domestic violence. I have heard instances where people are confused about the role of the program. It is not the same as other home visiting programs nor other HUSKY enrollment programs. It is a comprehensive program that incorporates best practices in order to improve birth outcomes. There is no other program like it in our community. We provide services to 460 clients each year. Each person is different who enters our office, but the opportunity to have an impact during this critical life stage is always present. I'd like to share with you a recent success story about Maria to illustrate the impact.

Maria came into our office, pregnant and reported she had private insurance from her job, but had a high deductible that she was unable to pay. Upon further assessment, she also disclosed that she was living in an illegal basement apartment and was smoking cigarettes. We worked together to enroll Maria into Medicaid as a secondary insurer so that she could enroll in prenatal care. Upon building a relationship with Maria, I was able to educate her on the importance of quitting smoking and supported her through the challenges of smoking cessation. As of today, Maria is tobacco free and is moving into her new apartment.

What would have happened to Maria if our program was not there to help her develop a care plan that was comprehensive in addressing her insurance, health and housing needs?

The governor's budget proposes reducing HUSKY income limits for parents and pregnant women to 138% of federal poverty level. So we know that she would not have been able to get Medicaid as a secondary insurance. Would she have delayed her prenatal appointments because she couldn't pay her co-pay? Would she have taken the initiative to figure out how to quit smoking? Found the phone number and called a separate quit-line phone number? Would she

have found an affordable, safe apartment to move into so her newborn had a safe place to return after delivery?

I'm not sure what the answers to these questions are. But I do know that this cost-effective program at less than \$500 per patient not only is successful anecdotally, but has research that documents the success in positive birth outcomes.

The reduction in coverage for pregnant women could lead to additional problems, as these women may not seek proper prenatal care. Combined with the proposed elimination of Healthy Start, this cut could jeopardize both the woman and her child, who, notably, will likely be a HUSKY enrollee upon birth.

I encourage the appropriations committee to reconsider and continue funding the successful Healthy Start program. As a Waterbury resident, I'm concerned for my clients, neighbors and community that relies upon the quality services my co-workers and I provide.

Thank you for considering.